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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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and
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Cooperating

SURVEY OF AGRICULTURAL LABOR CONDITIONS IN PAWNEE COUNTY, KANSAS

Tom Vasey, Farm Security Administration
and
Josiah C. Folsom, Bureau of Agricultural Economics

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This publication is one of a series of 11 with similar titles by Tom Vasey and Josiah C. Folsom. The reports are based on surveys made in the late summer and early autumn of 1936 of the economic and social conditions of adult agricultural laborers. The counties studied represent various types of farming in different parts of the United States, as follows:

<u>State</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>Type of Farming</u>
California	Placer	Fruit
Colorado	Archuleta	Stock-ranch
Illinois	Livingston	Corn
Iowa	Hamilton	Corn-Hog
Kansas	Pawnee	Winter wheat
Kentucky	Todd	Tobacco
Louisiana	Concordia Parish	Cotton (eastern)
Minnesota	Lac qui Parle	Small grain
Pennsylvania	Wayne	Dairy
Tennessee	Fentress	Self-sufficing
Texas	Karnes	Cotton (western)

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SURVEY OF AGRICULTURAL LABOR CONDITIONS IN PAWNEE COUNTY, KANSAS

By Tom Vasey, Farm Security Administration

and

Josiah C. Folsom, Bureau of Agricultural Economics

In response to a manifest need for more detailed information concerning hired farm laborers, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Social Research Section of the Farm Security Administration /1 undertook in the summer and fall of 1936 to make surveys of agricultural labor conditions in 11 representative counties in as many States. Funds for this research were made available by the Works Progress Administration.

Enumerators were engaged to canvass hired farm laborers and their employers, and schedules were used to record the information secured from each group. The schedule designed for laborers was rather complete, covering, in addition to age, education, and other such personal characteristics, job descriptions, wage rates, work histories for the preceding 12 months, and participation in community affairs. Farm operators were questioned concerning wage rates, fluctuations in numbers of employees, and methods of obtaining labor. /2

The enumerators were directed to use the limited time available for reaching as nearly as possible all the farms in the county hiring labor, except those that are not primarily dependent on agriculture as a source of income. The exceptions included country estates, livestock dealers, institutions, feed lots, boarding and lodging places, and unclassified farms. As to the laborers, the enumerators were instructed to interview "only those hired to do the work of adults at adult wages." This eliminated all unpaid family labor and any child labor receiving wage rates below those of adults. "Hired labor" or "employees" as the terms are used in this study refer to persons who work for wages and are dependent on wages paid by the farm operator. The amount of these wages does not depend on the income derived from the crop. The status of the operator, whether renter or owner, was not considered.

Pawnee County, Kansas, lies in the west central part of the State. Along the Arkansas River, which bisects the county, some sugar beets are grown, but the chief agricultural product is winter wheat. Except for the

/1 The Resettlement Administration, prior to September 1, 1937.

/2 The work was directed by representatives of the Department of Agriculture. The officials of the Experiment Station and of Kansas State College at Manhattan cooperated by making suggestions for the survey and in securing the enumerators, Kenneth Ekdahl and Harlan Rhodes of Manhattan, and Arthur Williams of Belleville.

few farms growing beets, the greatest demand for labor, which is heavy in spite of increasing mechanization, comes during the wheat harvest in June and July. This study was devoted primarily to the wheat-producing sections of the county.

At the time of the survey, September 2 to October 3, a small and relatively stable group of laborers was at work on the farms of the county, the primary job being that of drilling winter wheat. The migrant workers who had come at harvest time from numerous surrounding States had left again by September.

Most of the 1,164 farms enumerated in the 1935 Census were visited during this survey but only 129 of them were hiring labor at that time. Of the 191 laborers employed, 172 were interviewed. The data here presented are taken from the schedules supplied by both operators and laborers.

General Characteristics

The hired laborers on the farms of Pawnee County in the fall of 1936 were primarily young men. Nearly two-thirds were under 30 years of age and only 14 percent were 50 years old or over (Table 1). One-fifth of the entire group were under 20 -- chiefly farmers' sons working out for wages. Most of the men had had an elementary education or more, but only 4 reported more than high school. Increased educational opportunities are here reflected among the younger workers. Although the older ones, those more than 40 years old, constituted only one-fifth of the entire sample, they contributed one-half of the 36 who had failed to complete the eighth grade.

Table 1.- Age and education of 172 agricultural laborers,
Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Age	Total	Grades completed			
		0 - 4	5 - 7	8	9 and over
15	1	-	-	1	-
16	2	-	-	2	-
17	8	-	1	3	4
18	8	-	1	2	5
19	15	-	1	3	11
20 - 29	76	-	10	22	44
30 - 39	25	1	4	14	6
40 - 49	12	3	4	3	2
50 - 59	17	4	3	8	2
60 - 69	6	1	2	2	1
70 - 79	1	-	1	-	-
Not reported	1	-	-	1	-
Totals	172	9	27	61	75

Nearly two-thirds of all the workers interviewed were unmarried and without dependents. Not only a large proportion of the younger men, but also slightly less than 50 percent of those who were 30 years old and over, were single (Table 2). Two-fifths of those who did report dependents had only 1 child, and very few of them had more than 2.

Table 2.- Marital status of 172 agricultural laborers by age, Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Marital status	Age								Not reported
	Total	15-19: years	20-29: years	30-39: years	40-49: years	50-59: years	60-69: years	70-79: years	
Unmarried	113	32	54	13	3	7	3	-	1
Married	52	2	21	11	7	7	3	1	-
Widowed, divorced, or separated	7	-	1	1	2	3	-	-	-
Totals	172	34	76	25	12	17	6	1	1

Table 3.- Number of dependents of 170 agricultural laborers, /1 Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Number of dependents	Laborers	
	Number	Percent
0	115	67.5
1	23	13.5
2	11	6.5
3	9	5.3
4	4	2.4
5	4	2.4
6	3	1.8
7	-	-
8	-	-
9	1	.6
Total	170	100.0

/1 Two not reported.

Although 90 percent of the workers gave their residence as Kansas, only 59 were born there, the others coming from 16 other States and from foreign countries (Table 4). States as widely separated as Alabama and Idaho contributed to the Kansas labor supply. Eight of the 13 who gave

other States as their residence had entered Kansas in 1936, and return to their home States cannot be considered as certain. Over one-fifth of the men had left the State one or more times since 1930 to look for work, but only 23 workers had had jobs outside Pawnee County in the 12 months preceding the interview. Those who had come to Kansas in 1936 had moved more frequently and received lower average incomes than the others.

Table 4.- Birthplace of 170 male farm laborers, /1
Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

State or locality:	Nativity			Residence	
	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
Kansas	100	58.7		157	92.2
Missouri	20	11.8		3	1.8
Illinois	9	5.3		3	1.8
Foreign countries	9	5.3		-	-
Oklahoma	8	4.6		2	1.2
Arkansas	4	2.3		2	1.2
Kentucky	3	1.8		-	-
Nebraska	3	1.8		-	-
Colorado	2	1.2		-	-
Iowa	2	1.2		-	-
Other States	10	6.0		3	1.8
Totals	170	100.0		170	100.0

/1 All those interviewed were white males save 6 Mexican males, 5 of whom were Mexican-born.

About 50 percent of those interviewed were hired to operate tractors, plows, or other farm machinery while most of the others were general farm laborers, doing whatever tasks were assigned. A survey made in June or July would probably have found more harvest hands with an even higher percentage of machine workers and a smaller percentage of general farm hands.

Tenure Experience

The rather high proportion of young, single men represented in this study might suggest that these laborers are just beginning their ascent of the "agricultural ladder." However, it is possible to descend as well as to ascend, and in this group more than one-third had already had some experience as farm operators. Most of them had been renters rather than owners or sharecroppers; 53 workers, or 31 percent, had been tenants, and 13 others were still renting at the time of the survey (Table 5).

The reasons most frequently reported for giving up the operator status were crop failure and drought; some lost out through the drop in prices; and one or two had to give up operating a farm when their wives died, leaving no one to do the work of the homemaker (Table 6).

There had been few changes in occupational status during the 12 months preceding the survey. The only important change involved 21 workers, 13 percent of the total, who had been in school the year before. Most of the other workers had been agricultural laborers in August 1935 as well as in September 1936. There were 121 men who had had more than one job during the year, but only 56 had been employed in nonagricultural work.

Table 5.- Previous farm operation experience of 170 male agricultural laborers, Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Experience	Number	Percent
None	107	62.9
Sharecropper	6	3.5
Tenant	40	23.5
Cropper and tenant	2	1.2
Owner	3	1.8
Owner and cropper	1	.6
Owner and tenant	11	6.5
Total	170	100.0

Table 6.- Reason given for termination of tenant status by 39 agricultural laborers, Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936 /1

Reason given	Number	Percent
Crop failure	12	30.7
Drought	9	23.1
Wanted to try something else	5	12.8
No profit, not able to make a living	4	10.3
Moved to another county	3	7.7
Left alone, no one to help	2	5.1
Others	4	10.3
Total	39	100.0

/1 Twenty-three of these had quit since 1930; 13 others not included above reported themselves still tenants as well as farm laborers.

Table 7.- Total income, September 1935 - August 1936, of 160 agricultural workers, Pawnee County, Kansas

Total income	Number	Percent	Agricultural earnings			Nonagricultural earnings			Work relief
			By	By	By	By	By	By	
			laborers	dependents	laborers	dependents	laborers	dependents	
			Average	Number / 1	Average	Number / 1	Average	Number / 1	Average
\$ 1 - 49	5	3.1	\$23.40	-	-	1	\$24.00	-	-
50 - 99	18	11.2	62.35	-	-	4	41.00	-	1 \$ 7.00
100 - 149	30	18.8	95.20	-	-	5	66.00	-	2 65.00
150 - 199	17	10.6	149.65	-	-	6	59.83	-	1 50.00
200 - 249	21	13.1	186.38	-	-	5	66.80	3 \$35.67	4 75.50
250 - 299	12	7.5	222.00	-	-	5	94.20	-	2 55.00
300 - 349	12	7.5	307.17	-	-	-	-	-	-
350 - 399	16	10.0	312.50	-	-	3	130.00	-	4 127.50
400 - 449	7	4.4	410.86	-	-	-	-	-	-
450 - 499	6	3.8	312.00	-	-	3	288.00	-	1 88.00
500 - 549	3	1.9	496.00	1 \$50.00	-	-	-	-	-
550 - 599	3	1.9	262.67	-	-	2	498.00	-	-
600 and over	10	6.2	406.20	4	185.75	4	459.75	3 300.00	-
Totals and averages	160	100.0	207.09	5	158.60	38	151.87	6 167.83	15 79.80

1 "Number" in each case refers to number of laborers, not number of dependents.

2 As high as \$1,005.

Income

The annual incomes of these workers showed a wide variation, ranging from \$20 to \$1,005 (Table 7). Fifty-seven percent of all incomes were less than \$250 and 19 percent were between \$100 and \$149. Because of a few rather high incomes, the average was \$260; earnings from agricultural employment constituted 80 percent of this amount, and the remaining 20 percent was derived from both nonagricultural earnings and wages of dependents. However, there were just 11 of the entire group whose incomes were supplemented by the latter and only 38 who reported nonagricultural wages.

The group with the higher incomes did not depend solely on the agricultural earnings of one worker; in nearly all cases the higher the income, the greater the dependence on additional earnings. The highest income reported, \$1,005, attributed only \$340 to agricultural work and the remaining \$665 to wages received as a cement finisher's helper. About \$400 seemed to be the peak in average agricultural earnings, though one 33-year-old worker reported \$600 through permanent farm employment at \$50 a month -- a job he had held for 8 years.

For those whose time was divided between agricultural and nonagricultural employment, farm work was only slightly more important than the other pursuits. The average number of days spent in the wheat fields was 81 as compared with 71 in nonfarm work (Table 8). This relation held rather consistently regardless of the total amount of employment during the year. A much less even distribution of the amount of time worked is

Table 8.- Days worked in agriculture and in mixed employment
by 158 farm laborers, Pawnee County, Kansas

		: Agriculture :		Mixed employment	
Days :	:	:	:	Average in :	Average in
worked :	Number	:	Number	agricultural :	nonagricultural
0 - 29	3	:	4	13	5
30 - 59	13	:	4	26	14
60 - 89	10	:	6	35	33
90 - 119	10	:	8	53	39
120 - 149	5	:	4	49	84
150 - 179	5	:	4	99	68
180 - 209	7	:	3	136	60
210 - 239	2	:	7	110	120
240 - 269	3	:	6	134	114
270 - 312	49	:	5	159	144
Totals	107	:	51	81	71

found among those with only agricultural employment than among those with mixed employment. One-third had less than 120 days of agricultural work but 46 percent had 270 days or more, those with 120 to 270 days of work accounting for 21 percent of the cases. However, of the 36 who had worked less than 120 days, 21 were young unmarried men between 15 and 21 years of age; many were probably farmers' sons working out in addition to working on the home farms at other times.

In fact, most of those whose incomes were less than \$100 were in their teens and had been working and living at least part of the year on their fathers' farms. Another older worker reported that he worked on his father's farm and drew money as he needed it, amounting in all to about \$175 for the year.

One man who also operated his own farm received only \$35 in wages as a hired laborer. Three others who had given up farming during 1936 had not yet earned \$100 from farm wages.

Relatively few workers had any appreciable amount of property or savings. The item most frequently reported was an automobile. Despite the fact that four-fifths of the workers lived on the farms on which they worked, 55 percent owned cars "in running conditions." Eight owned farm land averaging 125 acres each, and 4 others owned houses in town. Savings in the form of bank accounts averaged \$133 for the 29 laborers reporting this item, and 41 carried life insurance policies averaging \$1,123.

Wage Rates

Wages of those interviewed were paid either by the month or by the day, with a few paid by the week and a few on piece rates. Three cases of workers picking onions by the row, and 4 beet workers on a contract basis, were enumerated but such arrangements were unusual. That payment by the day was more common was evident from the reports of both the laborers and the operators.

Although there are different bases for payment, all the laborers work long hours and 6 days a week, and the general farm hands must do chores 7 days a week. More than one-half of them worked 11 or more hours a day and 2 reported 15 hours as their normal day. There was, however, no apparent relation between the length of the working day and the wage rate.

The average rate of pay without regard to perquisites was \$31.67 per month and \$1.54 per day as reported by the laborers, and \$31.80 and \$1.73 respectively as reported by the operators. It is difficult to evaluate the perquisites which the laborers receive in addition to cash wages,

Table 9.- Daily and weekly wage rates paid and perquisites furnished agricultural laborers, Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Rate	Operators' reports				Laborers' reports			
	Without board		With board		Without board		With board	
	Total	house	Total	house	Total	house	Total	house
Per day:								
\$ 1.00	9	1	8	18	1	17	-	-
1.25	8	-	8	12	4	7	1	1
1.50	32	2	30	29	5	22	2	2
1.65	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
1.75	1	-	1	1	-	1	-	-
2.00	16	2	14	20	4	15	1	1
2.50	4	1	3	4	1	3	-	-
3.00	2	-	2	1	-	-	1	1
3.50	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	-
4.00	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Totals	78	7	71	85	15	65	5	5
Averages	\$1.73	\$2.07	\$1.70	\$1.54	\$1.60	\$1.51	\$1.85	\$1.85
Per week: /1								
\$ 5.00				1	1	-	-	-
7.00				2	1	1	-	-
8.00				1	-	1	-	-
9.00				1	-	-	1	1
10.00				1	1	-	-	-
Totals				6	3	2	1	1
Averages				\$7.67	\$7.33	\$7.50	\$9.00	\$9.00

/1 Operators were not asked for weekly rates.

but board and lodging definitely rank first. Apparently, their worth plays a very small part in governing rates of pay. The number of cases without board was not sufficient to make comparisons, but the average per month with board as reported by 32 laborers was \$28.50 and by the 41 operators as \$27.83. Although the number of cases is small, it is worth while to note that the value placed on board is much higher in the operators' reports than in those of the laborers. In each case the laborer who was furnished the use of a house received a higher rate of pay. The day laborers who did not receive board reported wage rates averaging only 9 cents higher than those with board. The better workers probably received higher pay as well as more valuable perquisites (Table 10).

Table 10.- Monthly wage rates paid and perquisites furnished agricultural laborers, Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Rate	Operators' reports				Laborers' reports			
	: Without	: With	: With	:	: Without	: With	: With	:
	: Total	: board	: board	: house	: Total	: board	: board	: house
\$12.00	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	-
18.00	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
20.00	10	-	10	-	9	-	9	-
22.00	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
25.00	3	-	3	-	5	2	3	-
26.00	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
30.00	18	-	14	4	19	2	13	4
32.50	3/1	-	3/1	-	-	-	-	-
35.00	9	4	2	3	14	5	3	6
39.00	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
40.00	10	-	5	5	6	2	2	2
50.00	3	1	-	2	3	1	-	2
70.00	1	1	-	-	1	-	1	-
Totals	63	6	41	16	58	12	32	14
Averages	\$31.80	\$43.33	\$37.69	\$31.67	\$34.58	\$34.58	\$28.50	\$36.43

/1 Includes one at \$33.

Nearly every worker who was furnished the use of a house received some additional perquisites. Many others who were not given the use of a house likewise received some of the varied minor items. One worker received milk, another garden space, and another pasture land for his stock. No one item stands out as the chief additional perquisite to board or lodging in Pawnee County.

Averages do not indicate that many workers actually were paid at the same rate. The laborers reported daily wage rates from \$1 to \$3, but 29 were placed at exactly \$1.50 and another 20 at \$2, these two amounts accounting for nearly three-fifths of the total. In the reports supplied by the farm operators these 2 rates account for more than 3 out of every 5. Similar concentrations at a few specific figures are found in the monthly rates.

Comparisons of wage rates for Pawnee County as gathered in this survey and as gathered for the State of Kansas by the Federal Crop Reporting Service are given in Table 11.

Table 11.- Average wage rates reported for Kansas, October 1 and for Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Source of reports	Per month		Per day	
	Without	With	Without	With
	board	board	board	board
Federal Crop Reporting Service <u>/1</u>	\$34.00	\$23.25	\$1.80	\$1.35
Operators' reports <u>/2</u>	43.33 <u>/3</u>	27.83	2.07 <u>/4</u>	1.70
Laborers' reports <u>/2</u>	34.58	28.50	1.60	1.51

/1 Federal Crop Reporting Service averages are from selected farm operators who regularly report wage rates among other items; this line represents the Kansas average for October 1, 1936.

/2 Farm operators and laborers interviewed in Pawnee County, September - October 1936.

/3 Six cases.

/4 Seven cases.

Tenure of Employment

Because of the character of the industry, instability marks the tenure of agricultural employment. Many operators report that they employ labor only occasionally, for plowing or for harvesting. The average number of laborers hired per farm by those reporting labor was 1.5 at the time of the survey. At the busiest time, July, these same farms hired an average of 3.6 laborers each and during the slack season they averaged only 6 workers per 10 farms. Thus, the number employed at the slack time is only one-seventh as great as during the peak period.

Harvest labor, employed for about 2 weeks per farm, is most in demand in June and July. Though none of the laborers who were interviewed were harvest hands, less than one-fourth had had the same job for more than 9 months, and one-half had obtained their jobs in June 1936, or later.

Placement in agricultural jobs comes largely through direct search on the part of the operator or the laborer. Occasionally a friend is the medium of contact. Placing only 2 of the 159 who reported how they found their jobs, public agencies played a relatively small part. Operators, likewise, stated that they relied upon their own or the laborers' initiative.

Table 12.- Methods of placement of farm laborers,
Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1936

Method	Laborers' reports		Operators' reports	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent ^{/1}
Sought by operator	63	39.6	76	58.9
Laborers' search	58	36.5	83	64.3
Through a friend	24	15.1	-	-
Through a public employment agency	1	.6	2	1.6
Through a private employment agency	-	-	1	.8
Through a relief agency	1	.6	5	3.9
Advertising	-	-	6	4.7
Miscellaneous	12	7.5	13	10.1

^{/1} The percent of the 129 operators who reported this method; since an operator may use more than one method this column does not total 100 percent.

Community Participation

Few of the farm laborers in Pawnee County belonged to any formal organizations. Two were members of nonagricultural labor unions but none reported membership in an agricultural union. One belonged to the Grange and 2 were members of the Farm Bureau. Two workers reported that they were at that time, and 2 others that they had been, members of a farmers' cooperative.

Table 13.- Community participation of 170 white agricultural laborers,
Pawnee County, Kansas, September 1935 - September 1936

Activity	Number reporting	Percent reporting	Average reported
Shopping	157	92.4	55.5
Movies	131	77.1	28.0
Community entertainments	116	68.2	19.2
Religious meetings	102	60.0	34.5
Ball games	92	54.1	15.7
Visits to friends or relatives	81	47.6	3.1
Circus	75	44.1	1.7
Farm practice demonstrations	39	22.9	2.1
Fishing trips	27	15.9	6.4
Farmers' institutes	13	7.6	3.3

Farm laborers took part in community life only through informal activity. Most of them reported that they went to town to shop every week. Motion pictures drew over three-fourths of the workers twice a month or oftener. Whereas religious gatherings ranked first or second as a source of social contact in most counties involved in this study, they ranked fourth in the number of participants in Pawnee County. Attendance at farmers' institutes or demonstrations during the past year was reported by a great many more laborers in this county than in the others.

Few beet workers of Pawnee County were included in this study, but it is probable that they would have seemed to be a segregated group. It is rather difficult to characterize the group of workers who were interviewed. Although the survey was not conducted during the harvest season, a large proportion of short-time employees were found. They were largely unmarried men or married men with few dependents. They were not migratory laborers; nevertheless they showed a fairly large degree of mobility. They were not a group set apart socially or economically, for most of the workers fitted themselves fairly well into the community.

These statistics show that in community life with average families in
activity. Most of these reported that they were in town in some way every week.
Notice pictures were over large numbers of the workers with a small or
of other. Whereas religious pictures showed that at second as a source
of social contact in most communities involved in this study. They were
found in the homes of participants in various counties. At least one of
interests, including or decreasing during the past year was reported
by a first class worker in this county than in the others.

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season, a large proportion of short-time employees were found. They were
largely unskilled and uneducated men with few dependents. They were not
slightly educated; nevertheless they showed a fairly large degree of
mobility. They were not a group who spent socially or economically
near the workers of the various counties being compared.

THE SURVEY METHOD

The survey was conducted in the summer of 1934. It was a cross-sectional
survey of the workers in the various counties. The survey was conducted
by a team of workers who were trained in the use of the survey method.
The survey was conducted in the following manner: The workers were
contacted by a team of workers who were trained in the use of the survey
method. The workers were then interviewed by a team of workers who were
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County	Number of workers	Number of families	Number of children
Adams	100	50	100
Albany	150	75	150
Alfonso	200	100	200
Altoona	250	125	250
Alton	300	150	300
Alton	350	175	350
Alton	400	200	400
Alton	450	225	450
Alton	500	250	500
Alton	550	275	550
Alton	600	300	600
Alton	650	325	650
Alton	700	350	700
Alton	750	375	750
Alton	800	400	800
Alton	850	425	850
Alton	900	450	900
Alton	950	475	950
Alton	1000	500	1000

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